

MONTANA UNTOLD

STORY LEADS

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Cooke City: A Winter Playground on the Edge of Heaven

Outdoor enthusiasts (and outdoor writers for that matter) will find a remote, winter oasis just outside the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park.



A cross-country skier and snowmobiler in Cooke City.

Cooke City and adjacent Silver Gate, provides an unparalleled base camp for adventurers (and journalists) looking for a snow-intensive experience. Whether for backcountry skiing and snowboarding, superlative snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, ice climbing or ice fishing, visitors to this wintry secret spot will find an intimate, charming town surrounded by world-class recreation.

By winter, when the famous Beartooth Highway hibernates for the season under 400 inches of snow, Cooke City becomes a wilderness cul-de-sac that is only reachable from one direction. Visitors drive in from the Mammoth entrance of Yellowstone National Park, crossing through the wildlife rich Lamar Valley. In addition to steam-breathing buffalo, elk and other mega fauna, those who keep their eyes peeled often spot wolves that were reintroduced to the ecosystem in the late 1990s.

Some visitors choose to tap into the cross-country skiing, as well as backcountry skiing and snowboarding, that beckons in

and around Cooke City. A groomed trail system provides tracks for Nordic tourers wishing to kick and glide. For those seeking big mountain turns and steep and deep terrain, Cooke City delivers. In recent years, major ski film production companies and niche media serving hardcore ski and snowboard readers have tapped into the bounty of the area.

Snowmobilers from around the world consider Cooke City a sledder's Mecca. In 2004, the area was voted number one snowmobile destination in the USA by SnoWest Magazine. With over 60 miles of groomed trails there is ample terrain for riders of all abilities. Some will seek the spectacular panoramic views up on 10,000-foot Daisy Pass. Others might

choose to explore the old mining country around Lulu Pass or simply enjoy the powder billowing over their windshield in meadows around Henderson Mountain.

Established in the early 1880's, visitors to Cooke City will appreciate the rustic, old west atmosphere of the town. With ample restaurants and lodging options, the only quandary one might face is how to do it all... how to savor all those wonderful, one-of-a-kind snowflakes.

For more information on Cooke City, log onto www.cookecitychamber.org. Cooke City is located in Montana's Yellowstone Country. To find lodging and other area information, go to www.yellowstone.visitmt.com.

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The Call of the Wild

The call of the wild is strong at the new Elk Country Visitor Center in Missoula.

Your husband hunts, your kids snowboard, you ski and your in-laws love antique shopping. Challenged by the thought of planning a family vacation that meets everyone's needs? How about a trip that serves up outdoor adventure, Western heritage, natural history and breathtaking scenery, all the while weaving in a bit of education that kids might find cool?

It's all located along the route between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, in a city many are heralding as the next best thing. With miles of trails and rivers, a happening downtown, a steep and deep ski area, and a plethora of attractions well-suited for all ages, Missoula is a city on the verge. Adding to the city's repertoire, the Rocky Mountain

Elk Foundation opened its new Elk Country Visitor Center on November 1, 2005.

The organization designed the center to educate and inspire anyone with an interest in wild places and wildlife populations. Visitors can get their hands on the elk bugling game—sounds made by elk and other wildlife are both fun and educational—and "Habitat Neighbors" game, as well as touchable reproductions of fleshers, scrapers, weapons and other items used by early Americans. Lift a real bull elk antler, view world-record mounts or push a button and see what's happening in your home state.

A panoramic diorama of different elk habitats makes the enormity of elk country



Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Elk Country Visitor Center in Missoula.

real while the Hunting Heritage cabin offers a peaceful place to recollect family hunting traditions. Finally, the 30-seat Wildlife Theater promises regular showings of inspiring films about wildlife and wild places.

For more information about the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, log onto rmef.org. Missoula is located in Montana's Glacier Country. To find local information, go to www.missoulacvb.org.

The Early Birds Get the Dinosaurs

Every summer, the Judith River formations of Eastern Montana become Dino Central for vacationers lucky enough to accompany Nate Murphy and the staff at the Judith River Dinosaur Institute on a dino dig. And with only a few slots available on these digs (typically only a dozen or so per project), bookings fill up weeks and months ahead of time.

In 2006, the Judith River Dinosaur Institute is offering four opportunities to join a dinosaur exploration: two five-day "work" weeks in July, and two five-day "work" weeks in August. All four

programs will take place in the Malta area at the "Lunch Box" site (so named because it's where previous explorers found fossilized remains of a *brachylophosaurus* literally torn apart by a

very large *tyrannosaur*), as well as some new unexplored areas of the Judith River formation. "Dino" Russ Jacobson will join the August digs as a guest paleontologist.

While no training is required for the digs, visitors will "rough it" in the Montana badlands while learning how to recognize fossils, how new sites are found and how to handle new discoveries in the field. (Past participants have discovered famous specimens such as "Leonardo," considered the best-preserved dinosaur ever unearthed.)

Murphy is also participating with Steve Bury (of the Makoshika Dinosaur Museum) and Dr. Timothy Huang (of DinoDragon International Research Foundation in Taipei, Taiwan) to plan an "All Star Dino Dig" in Montana during the Summer of 2006. Details are still being planned at press time, but Dr. Huang is hoping to bring kids from Taiwan and China to join the tour. The tour is expected to visit several stops along the newly-established Montana Dinosaur Trail (www.mtdinotrail.org), including Fort Peck, Makoshika Park and Two Medicine Dinosaur Center.



Dinosaur digging with Nate Murphy.

For more information about the Judith River Dinosaur Institute, call 406-654-2323 or log onto www.montanadinosaur digs.com. Log onto www.missouririver.visitmt.com to find lodging and other area information in Missouri River Country.

Great Falls Gets Artsy in March



The CM Russell Auction of Original Western Art, including a "quick draw" competition (below).

The city of Great Falls, long famous for the endeavors of favorite son Charles M. Russell, will be the center of artistic attention in mid-March 2006 when it hosts no less than five art shows and auctions in one week.

The biggest event, and arguably one of the most famous western art auctions in the world, is the CM Russell Auction of Original Western Art. Each year, on the weekend



closest to CM Russell's birthday (March 19), the auction displays the work of more than 200 western artists in a multifaceted benefit for the CM Russell Museum. Since 1969, the annual auction has netted more than \$17 million in sales. Other events tied to the

auction include a popular "Quick Draw" art competition, Blackfeet Indian Dancers and more than 100 seminars—free and open to the public. But the Russell Art Auction is just the beginning of the city's artistic endeavors; four other simultaneous art shows will make it a March to remember in Great Falls. The Western Heritage Art Show, March 15-19 at the Great Falls Holiday Inn, promises the work of 65 artists from 14 states. This year marks the event's silver anniversary, beginning with an Artist Preview and Reception

on Wednesday, followed by five days of music, seminars, an auction to benefit the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center Association, and opportunities to talk with—and purchase work from—the artists.

The Jay Contway and Friends Art Show, March 16-19 at Montana Expo Park, is a gathering of more than 45 artists who display and sell their work. Artists travel from several western states and Canadian provinces, bringing oils, water colors, pastels, sculpture, stone and wood carvings, fine jewelry, leather and metal work.

The Manitou Art Show, March 16-18, happens at the TownHouse Inn of Great Falls. Artists will display their work surrounding the hotel pool area while western art and artifacts are auctioned live and online. The Manitou Auction is presented by the Best of the West Galleries.

The 24th Annual Great Falls Native American Art Show at the Great Falls Convention Center celebrates the rich traditions of Montana's original artists from March 16-19. Roughly 30 Native American artists will display work. Blackfeet artist Terrance Guardipee will be the featured artist, and Governor Brian Schweitzer will be the special guest speaker on Saturday night.

For more information about the CM Russell auction, call 406-761-6453 or log onto www.cmrauction.com. Great Falls is located in Montana's Russell Country. To find lodging and other area information, go to www.russell.visitmt.com.

Forest Service Cures Cabin Fever

To all those who've always itched to have a cozy, out-of-the-way cabin in the woods of Montana: the USDA Forest Service has two dozen of them available in the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest, starting at just \$20.

Yes, overnight rentals of Forest Service cabins start at just \$20 and, at the risk of sounding like a MasterCard commercial, the serenity they offer—especially in the winter months—is priceless. Why? In winter, many of the cabins are only accessible by snowmobile, snowshoes or cross country skis. For instance, Hogan Cabin, 25 miles west of Wisdom, requires a 5-mile snowmobile ride or a 3.2-mile cross country/snowshoe trek. Doney Cabin, 11 miles northwest of Deer Lodge, is an 8-mile journey. And, not for the faint-of-heart (or weak-of-legs), West Fork Cabin, 40 miles south of Ennis, is a 30-mile trek. These truly are places where visitors can "leave it all behind."

Facilities vary by cabin; some have propane heat, drinking water or other services, while others have basic bunk beds and wood stoves. As an example, Divide Cabin, 60 miles south of Sheridan, is a new one-room cabin with two single beds, cooking utensils and a propane-fueled cook stove, heater and lantern. Vigilante cabin, 25 miles south of Alder, is actually a 2-bedroom frame house with electric lights.

Visitors can browse through all of the cabins available for rent in our national forests online at www.fs.fed.us/recreation/reservations. Beginning February 1 of 2006, they'll also be able to reserve the cabins online at www.reserveusa.com. This new site will provide full details on the rental, as well as directions to the cabin.

The cabins mentioned in this article are in Montana's Gold West Country. To find lodging and other area information, go to www.goldwest.visitmt.com.



One of many Forest Service cabins available for rent.

Harleys and History Ready to Rumble

Two hundred years of history and 10,000 Harley Davidson motorcycles will converge on Billings and the surrounding region in the Summer of 2006, thanks to two major national events.



Pompeys Pillar National Monument.



The first is "Clark on the Yellowstone," a national signature event July 22-25, 2006, commemorating the bicentennial of the famous Lewis & Clark Expedition. "Clark on the Yellowstone" celebrates William Clark's return journey along the Yellowstone River at Pompeys Pillar National Monument outside of Billings. Pompeys Pillar is perhaps the most significant Lewis and Clark site in the nation, as it's home to the last remaining physical evidence of the entire journey intentionally left by the party: Clark's signature, carved into the sandstone forma-

tion on July 25, 1806. (All of which gives the term "signature event" a whole new meaning.)

The second event is the national Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.) Rally, thundering into Billings June 30-July 1. H.O.G. is the official riding club of the Harley-Davidson Motor company; worldwide, the group has more than 900,000 members, and at least 10,000 of them are expected to make the trek to Billings. Officially dubbed "Club H.O.G. Wild West: 23rd Annual Rally," the event will feature a trade show at

MetraPark, a parade expected to reach 7 miles in length, and a community-wide party to introduce Harley enthusiasts to the city of Billings (and vice versa). Tentatively, the community-wide party is slated to be held at Skypoint in downtown Billings.

To celebrate the event, organizers have created a special rally raffle, which is selling \$100 raffle tickets for a chance to win a 2006 Fat Boy Harley-Davidson.

For more information about "Clark on the Yellowstone," log onto www.clarkontheyellowstone.org. For more information about the H.O.G. Rally, log onto www.beartoothog.com. Billings is located in Montana's Custer Country. To find lodging and other area information, go to www.billingschamber.com.

Fresh Snow and Fresh Angles Montana Ski Area News

Come to Montana this winter and reconnect with the uncomplicated, uncrowded essence of skiing and snowboarding. You'll find sixteen ski areas spread across the Big Sky State, from world-class resorts offering deep snow, massive verticals and boundless amenities, to down-home, family run ski areas offering superb value.

Journalists will find plenty of fresh snow and fresh angles. For example:

BIG MOUNTAIN—near Whitefish, has a new Super Pipe for aspiring tricksters. At 450 feet long, 65 feet wide, with 15 feet high walls at a 16 % pitch, this precisely sculpted half-pipe meets competition standards and will have lights and a thumping sound system. www.bigmtn.com

BIG SKY RESORT & MOONLIGHT BASIN—near Bozeman, have joined forces and now offer the option of European-style, interconnected skiing and snowboarding on Lone Peak. Combined, the two areas offer a whopping 5,300 acres, the largest ski area in the USA! www.bigskyresort.com, www.moonlightbasin.com

RED LODGE—near Billings, will host their spirited Winter Carnival February 24-26, 2006; come check out the Cardboard Classic Downhill, skijoring and other raucous events. www.redlodge.com

SHOWDOWN—near Great Falls, is celebrating their 70th anniversary of

offering a high quality, low key, mom and pop ski experience. Skiing isn't all about fur, glitter, and condos; come to Showdown this winter and reconnect with the real deal. www.showdownmontana.com

LOST TRAIL—southwest of Missoula, has extra early snow and opened November 12th! Check out their high angle, cliff punctuated terrain in Hollywood Bowl. Warm up and get a bite at their new Round House Yurt at the base of Hollywood. www.losttrail.com

LOOKOUT PASS—on the Montana/Idaho border, has offered free skiing lessons since 1935! Over the years they've taught something on the order of 50,000 people how to extract the most fun out of winter...gratis! www.skilookout.com

Looking for more Montana ski area fodder for story ideas? Give us a call, as there is lots more to tell.

FROM MONTANA

The diversity of events, places and people in Montana is almost as wide as the state itself. We hope to give you a taste of that diversity with this quarterly newsletter. In addition, the following services are offered to editors, writers and producers:

Visual Materials

Color slides, digital images and stock video footage are available for editorial use.

Writer/Photographer Referrals

We can put you in contact with many of Montana's most talented and experienced freelance writers and photographers.

Editorial Copy/Calendar of Events

We can provide background information or editorial copy for many subjects. We also maintain a calendar of events for the entire state.

Individual Attention

If you need the latest vacation guide and road map of Montana, a liaison with other government agencies or detailed information to fit a specific story angle, we're here to assist you.

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